

DECONSTRUCTING GENDER DISCOURSE: A REVIEW*

Abdul Wahab Suri

Department of Philosophy, University of Karachi

Introduction

The work of Kant, Hegel, Darwin, Marx, and Comte transformed the idea of material progress into a historical necessity. It has constantly been claimed that "industrial society is the most successful way of life mankind has ever known... our people eat better, sleep better, live in most comfortable dwellings, get around more in greater comfort, and live longer than they have ever done before" (Ayers xxiv). It is assumed that the existing life style of the developed Western nations is the manifestation of the "natural culmination of the potentials already existing in Neolithic man" (Gustavo p.9). The natural outcome of such an ontological account of human potential is that history has been reinterpreted in purely Western terms.

Material progress legitimises the west's global hegemony (Esteva p.9). This conception of progress presupposes certain values, lifestyle, conceptions of the good, gender, equality and freedom, which are historically determined and culturally specific. The medieval, religious and traditional non-western values are naturally in conflict with these western values and prejudices. Since this idea of progress and development is accepted as universal so, naturally non-western religious values are considered as irrational.

The negation of western values by the non-western world in general and the Islamic world in particular is considered as a reactionary posture, devoid of ontological and epistemological grounding. It is assumed that the dominance of western values lies in the epistemological superiority of western culture. Therefore, it is accepted both at political and intellectual level that "the third world had to develop first before it could even think about real progress" (Sbert p.195).

* Human Development In Asia 2000: the Gender Question Mahbub-ul-Haq Human Development Centre, Karachi Oxford University Press 2000.

This is the perspective in which the gender issue has been discussed in the Human Development Annual Report 2000. The methodology of the report is two dimensional;

- a) Descriptive
- b) Prescriptive

The first two chapters provide the framework for the subsequent discussion. The third and fourth chapters are of informative nature regarding the gender issue. The rest of the chapters except the fifth and the eighth are of descriptive nature. Chapter eight in general and chapter five in particular are the chapters in which the real prescriptive posture of this Report has been concretized. In this extended review we are more interested in the prescriptive dimension of the Report, along with the conceptual analysis of the basic assumptions regarding the issues of progress, development, equality, liberty and of course "priority of the right over the good." We have contextualised these issues within a framework through which the gender issues in South Asia may be analysed.

This review has been divided into three sections. In the first section, we have identified the major prescriptions of the report. In the second section, we identify the substantive theoretical framework, which is presumed by the Report. We have also identified the internal contradictions of this framework. In the third section we have specifically discussed the gender issue within the theoretical context which we have discussed in our second section.

I. Feminism's Prejudices

There are two major issues, which have been inter-connectedly discussed in this report: "Gender" and "Development". It is claimed that the major cause of under-development in South Asia is gender discrimination. It is also claimed that tendencies like male chauvenism and exploitation of women are reinforced by the traditional, religious, political, legal and social structures of South Asian countries. Due to the discriminatory attitude towards women, economic progress and development is retarded. However, on the basis of empirical data and statistical projection, it is claimed that now things are improving. The following are the different factors of change, which have been identified as root causes of women's emancipation:

- i) Technological advancement;
- ii) Internal dialectic of economic structural change;
- iii) Liberalization of information technology;
- iv) Development of the free market economy and the dismantling of national planning;
- v) The fragility of totalitarian state craft and the "inflation" of the phenomena of non-governmental organisation;
- vi) Repudiation of religious society by individuals and evolution of "contractually structured, civil society";
- vii) Cultural and corporate globalization;

It is claimed that the socio-political, economic and legal emancipation of women is the

necessary pre-condition for economic progress and prosperity. Moreover economic progress is the only legitimate political and social ideal. It is suggested that the state must play its role in the liberation of women as an instrument for the realization of the universally valid political agenda of progress.

Gender discrimination constructs social differences. The Report suggests that gender analysis opens up a new paradigm of discourse regarding the distribution of power and social interaction between the sexes. The Report in reality is a jumble of prejudices which are necessary to undertake such analysis.

These prejudices are:

- a) South Asian women are the most oppressed people in the world;
- b) A patriarchic social structure in South Asia controls;
 - i) Reproductive and sexual capabilities of women;
 - ii) Ownership and control over property;
 - iii) Female mobility;
 - iv) Opportunities of education and information;
- c) The self is basically antecedently individuated;
- d) The right has priority over the good;
- e) Secularisation of society is optional for human beings in general and for women in particular.
- f) Religious society is necessarily unjust and civil society ensures social justice.
- g) Liberty of an individual is defined in terms of economic independence of the individual.
- h) Contract is the only legitimate basis for the establishment a just relationship between individuals.

Within the hermeneutical circle of these (historically, epistemologically and culturally specific) prejudices the Report focuses on:

- a) Institutionalized "violence" against women;
- b) The constraints faced by women in;
 - i) The labour market;
 - ii) The judicial system;
 - iii) As entrepreneurs;
 - iv) In political representation;
- c) Gender blind policies regarding development. Traditionally the realization of the practical needs¹ or interests of women were equated to the well being of women. It is claimed in the Report that the strategic needs² of women are much more important than practical needs. It has also been claimed that stra-

tegic needs are consistently being ignored in South Asia. The reason for this is that strategic needs of women redefine the whole framework of rights and duties which challenges the existing balance of power. "In order to change women's position, we must address the way gender determines power, status, and control over resources" (March et al 1999 p. 82).

The UN declaration (Decade for Women 1975) was initially, focused on practical needs, of women WID (women in development) redefines women's role in "... the development process as reproductive, productive and community workers and emphasises the fulfillment of their *strategic needs through direct state intervention*" (Human Development in South Asia p. 28). The justification for active state intervention is that, the realization of strategic needs is not just a matter of economic maneuvering, it is a political issue.

This conception of women's strategic needs and its enervated justification of state intervention rests upon the following prejudices.

- a) The fulfillment of "strategic needs" are necessary for achieving the ultimate political end i.e. development progress;
- b) The strategic gender needs are correctly identified by post feminist theory and are universally valid;
- c) The strategic gender needs are intelligible and based on rational grounds (affirmed by universally valid reason);

The Report has chronologically described the systematic transformation in approaches and efforts which have been taken for the "emancipation" of women. The WID programme was initiated by the "equity approach" which defines women's role in the over all development process. Later on this approach was replaced by the "anti-poverty" approach which was focused on the practical interests of women in the overall production process. The anti-poverty approach was repudiated by the "efficiency approach". The "efficiency" approach considered women's time and energy as elastic.

The nature of equity, anti-poverty and efficiency approaches is basically instrumental (for the development of human beings in general and women in particular). The "empowerment approach" considers improving the social position of women as an end in itself rather than as a means to realize certain ends. The equity and empowerment approaches were labeled as GAD (gender and development) approaches because of their emphasis on the strategic needs of women.

Now a days the majority of the secularists focus their attention on the "right-based-approach". The rights based approach incorporates issues of "welfare, anti-poverty, equity and empowerment as facets of the rights of all people". (Human Development in South Asia 2000 p. 28).

The achievement of human rights (which is actually a political end and is based on Enlightenment ontology, metaphysics and cosmology) becomes the criterion for the realization of other ends like economic progress. It has been claimed that "human rights are the ultimate

objective of all development processes" (Human Development Report p. 29).

The Report acknowledges that human rights in general and women's rights in particular have been hindered by "Asian values based upon community rights". Further "countries with a strong religious tradition that is integrated into state administration and governance often perceive human rights as a secular ideology antagonistic to religious and cultural tradition" (Human Development p. 29).

It is claimed that the IIIrd and IVth world conferences on women in Nairobi and Beijing have established a consensus on "the social prioritisation of Human Rights" particularly the unqualified human rights to "freedom of conscience" and "religion".

The rights based approach is politically backed by the imperialists. "This involves breaking down unequal relationships based on the socially – constructed hierarchies of gender,... age, class, ethnicity, religious and other socio-economic factors – through a process of formalization of individual rights and institutional responsibility" (Human Development p. 76).

It is claimed that South Asian women are not enjoying legal equality irrespective of the constitutionally guaranteed equality. The Report suggests that realization of "legal equality" is not possible due to the internal contradiction of constitutions. The articles regarding the issue of "equality" are contradicted by:

- Individual laws
- Gaps in the legal framework
- The decision of parallel judiciaries most importantly the Shariat Courts
- Other constitutional articles and provision

The culturally and religiously governed specific laws are considered as the major obstacle to the realisation of the equal rights of women. In a nut shell, it is claimed that although in South Asian countries women's legal equality is constitutionally guaranteed they are living as second class citizens. There are three major reasons for this legal inequality.

- a) Constitution contradiction.
- b) Constitutionally created, "Supra-constitutional bodies" like the Council of Islamic Ideology and the Federal Shariat Courts.
- c) Ambiguous articulation of constitutionally guaranteed rights provide room for misinterpretation or discrimination.

As far as problems (a) and (c) are concerned, it is clear that:

- i) These problems are not specific to South Asian constitutional framework because all constitutions are constituted by finite individuals rather than a Divine will. They are therefore necessarily incomplete, opaque and self contradictory.

- ii) Secondly, these problems are not specific to the "exploitation" of women rather we can explain any kind of "discriminatory legal practice" (against any sect, religion, race, community etc) on the basis of the misinterpretation of constitutionally guaranteed right.

As far as problem (b) is concerned it requires a serious and careful analysis but at this stage we merely note that, between the lines the report suggests that *the creation of supra-constitutional bodies through the constitution is against the spirit of liberal secularism*. Supra-constitutional bodies actually contradict the autonomy of the human will and its sovereignty. The constitution is actually the concretization of human sovereignty. Supra-constitutional agency of any kind negates the absolute autonomy of the human being as autonomous "law giver". We will excavate the philosophical foundation of this contradiction between constitution and constitutionally created supra-constitution agency in our next section.

In order to "emancipate" women from legal and political dominance of man, the Report suggests a practical strategy. It is suggested that already existing secular anti Islamic laws be consolidated by:

- a) Revitalizing constitutionally guaranteed secular civil codes.
- b) Considering imperialist sanctioned international woman rights treaties as the definite text to win legal battle in favor of women.

II. Feminism Capitalism's Handmaiden

The Report suggests that over all "emancipation" of women is the necessary precondition of economic progress and development. It claims that the major cause of the economic backwardness of this part of the world is not economic. Social, political and religious structures are real causes of the underdevelopment of South Asia. It is also presumed that South Asian women are the most poor and oppressed sections of humanity and the reason of this religiously sanctioned oppression is the violation of universally valid human rights.

It is interesting to note that the remedy for this gender "oppression" "exploitation" "discrimination" provided by the Report is historically determined and culturally specific. The structural solution to women "suffering" in South Asia is the construction of a policy framework, which is:

- Politically liberal.
- Legally secular.
- Socially civil (contractually structured civil society).
- Economically capitalist (free market economy).

In this section we are going to critically analyse the

- i) Conception of self presumed by the Report
- ii) The authenticity of its prioritization of rights over the good

iii) Its advocacy of the secularization of law and associated political implications

The Report regards the right-based approach as the most profound, comprehensive and effective means for ending gender "discrimination". Unlike other approaches, which are basically good-based the right-based approach focuses on the constitution of a framework of 'rights' which (in principle only) makes the pursuit of every particular conception of good possible.

Liberal theory considers "good" or "virtue" as trivial in the constitution of just principles. Therefore, liberals prioritize rights over the good and try to create a framework in which every body is free to pursue his own conception of the good. This prioritization of fundamental rights theoretically rejects every: legal policy, distributive scheme social constitution, religious expression and political frame work etc which negates individual human rights.

The right-based approach considers the individual as an end in himself. In order to sustain the autonomy of the self, the value of non interference is presumed to have lexical priority over substantive values. The right based liberal version "is grounded in the conception of a subject which is prior to its end, a concept held indispensable to our understanding of a freely choosing, autonomous being" (Mulhall and Swift p. 45)

The autonomy of the self is presumed, the "will" is not caused by its end. It is neither the "means" for the pursuit of some other ends, nor the by-product of some prior causes rather it is an end in itself.

The detachment of the self from its end justifies two things:

- a) The autonomy of the self.
- b) The priority of the right over its ends or the good.

Liberals do not consider freedom as an empirically determined end they regard it as the pre-condition of morality and social justice "the priority of right is 'derived' entirely from the concept of freedom in the mutual external relationship of human beings and has nothing to do with the end which all men have by nature or with the recognized means of attaining this end" (Sandel p. 1)

The prioritization of the right and the detachment of the self from its ends reflects the moral propensity of the liberals. It not only ignores the significance of the good, and of virtue in the constitution of self identity, it also rejects the role of "historically determined good" in the development of self-identity. According to the right based theorists free and autonomous expression (irrespective of its consequences and ramifications) of "will" "... is most fundamental to the dignity and worth of human beings...it elevates them above the realm of causally determined nature" (Rawls p. 30). In the right based liberal paradigm there is no theoretical instrument which makes possible the objective ordering of the individual's preferences so there is no possibility of self – interpretation and moral growth.

This means that the priority of individual liberty is considered to be the absolute "right" which cannot be overridden even for the general welfare of society. This sanctity of individual "right" was acknowledged by Mill, Locke and Kant. This prioritization of the right is the only fundamental "moral" category because, every body has a right to frame, revise and rationally pursue his own conception of the good.

The right based theorist claims that liberty (right) has precedence over the good. This prioritization is justified by the neutrality of right which every individual possesses (right of self-determination) by birth. Rawls believes that it is unjust to sacrifice freedom for the realization of any particular good or virtue.

The detachment of the self from its conception of the good, end and virtue justifies its antecedent individualization. The unincumbency of the self is in-itself considered to be the sole criterion for authenticity. The identity of this self is that it has not objectively been identified by anything other than itself, "... my values and ends do not define my identity. I must regard myself as the bearer of a self distinct from my values and ends whatever they may be." (Sandel p. 12).

On the basis of this, the right based liberals claim that the liberal agenda is basically universalist in nature. They believe that the highest order interest of individuals is always "self determination".

Since this highest order interest has been derived by "pure reason" and this abstraction is independent of the substantive values and cultural influences, therefore universally valid reason legitimises the universality of liberalism.

The social structure which legitimately in-cooperates this a-social individualism is that of civil society. In order to sustain such an antecedently individuated self, civil society performs two functions simultaneously:

- a) Repudiation of religious society
- b) Development of a self-sustaining mechanism by a systematically organized (imperialist sanctioned) legal frame work.

Unlike religious society, civil society assumes "contract" (among equally free, rational and mutually self-interested individuals) as a basis of social association. In such a contractually structured society equally free individuals are held together by the impersonal bonds of interests. The civil society frame work de-legitimizes any bases for social mobilization and cooperation other than self-interest. In civil society there is no role of religion in the public sphere, it is limited strictly to the private life of the individuals and thus trivialised. In a nutshell civil society contrasts itself from religious society. Civil society provides a frame work in which antecedently individuated a-religious, a-cultural, a-historical selves realize their freedom without threatening the autonomy of others.

The problem is that the maximization of freedom is not possible without the maximiza-

tion and accumulation of capital. *In contemporary political economy freedom takes the form of capital.* Capital is the concrete form of freedom. The problem is that the realm of capital is the market. It is because of this that in civil society, all relationships are inevitably marketized, "selling and buying" becomes the dominant rational content of human life. The market becomes the value giving agency. In short civil society is simply market society.

Civil society emphasizes the decentralization of state power along with the consolidation of private power. It assumes a "free" judiciary, media and market. In a nutshell, principally civil society presumes a weak state. *Civil society creates an illusion that individuals are free from state coercion, religious extremism and racial provincialism, but in reality it imposes the dominance and the sovereignty of capital over all other forms of human expression.*

The establishment of contractarian society and dominance of capital are ensured by a capitalist mode of economy. In short civil society is basically a capitalist institution which emerges to sustain a liberal public order, subject to the dominance of capital. *Human right discourse provides the theoretical legitimacy of such a social, political, legal and economic construction.*

The theoretical background of right based liberalism reveals that:

1. The worth of a "self" is not determined by its ends, virtue and conception of the good.
2. There is no role for religion, culture, history and language in the constitution of "self" identity.
3. Since the "rights" are not determined, with reference to my substantive conception of "good" (for instance obeying the will of God,) there is no justification for the existence of any supra-constitutional body. The constitution (in theory) is the concretisation of absolute human sovereignty. A supra-constitutional body of any kind negates the absolute autonomy of the human being, which is against the spirit of liberal constitution and its prioritization of the right over the good.
4. This means that the prioritization of "right" (right of self-determination) over "good" necessarily assumes a secular framework.
5. Secularism is not a-ideological, it resists any legal, social, political, cultural and religious institution which is incompatible with its own epistemology, ontology, metaphysics and axiology.
6. The right based liberal framework allows everyone to pursue his own conception of the good (at the individual level) subject to the constraint that the only public good is the "will to freedom" i.e. the maximisation of capital accumulation.

Let us critically evaluate this liberal strand in another perspective. In this conceptual analysis, we are going to focus on Charles Taylor's argument regarding the possibility of "priority of right over the good" as a universally valid truth and its internal contradictions.

The human self is not to be treated as the object of scientific study. According to Taylor, man is a self-interpreting animal and there is no possibility of having an abstract realm of the self, which transcends historical specificity and a particular linguistic community. The self-interpreting capacity of the individual is the defining characteristic of human being, "human beings are self-interpreting animals, creatures whose identity as person depends upon their orientation and attachment to the conceptions of the good which derive from the matrix of their linguistic community" (Mulhall and Swift p. 2). This means that the constitution of the individual's identity depends upon the orientation and attachment, derived from the social matrix of a particular community and answers the questions which have emerged and are organically related to the ontological basis of that community. The Rawlsian self is antecedently individuated and independent of history and culture, because of this deontological temper self-interpretation is ontologically not possible within the Rawlsian framework. Taylor emphasizes that, self-interpretation is the defining characteristic of the human being but this self-interpretation is made possible by a bounded rationality, the "rationality" derived from the social matrix of a particular language community. Taylor believes that unincumbency of the self is not possible because historical specificity is inescapable. The self is ontologically incapable of escaping from the linguistic/moral space in which it has been situated. "To understand our predicament in terms of finding or losing orientation in moral space is to take the space which our frameworks seeks to define as ontologically basic" (Taylor p. 29). The moral space in which self-interpretation itself exists independently, is irrespective of the fact that whether it is considered as legitimate space for moral evaluation. The natural corollary of this is that the community exists independently and is ontologically prior to the individual. "Finding my bearings is something I do in space that exists independently both of me and my success or failure in orienting myself within it" (Mulhall and Swift p. 106).

Taylor's distinction between moral intuitions and instinctual intuitions is also very crucial in determining the role of community in the constitution of self-identity. He thinks that the rational elucidation or articulation of moral intuitions is possible on the basis of participation in a particular linguistic community. "Moral judgment and intuition are essentially capable of rational elucidation or articulation, a process that requires the invocation of fundamental and wide ranging evaluative frameworks also deriving from the community" (ibid p. 102). So the community is a structural precondition for the constitution of a moral self. On the other hand, the articulation of moral intuitions is possible only in a linguistic matrix, in which the self has been situated. The meaning of moral intuitions has not been derived at an "archimedian" position, it is contextually determined. This context actually provides an overarching category based on certain metaethical narratives which are ontologically grounded in a particular kind of historical specificity. The natural corollary of this metaphysical presumption is that man is condemned to interpret himself, subject to the constraint that the space of this self-interpretation is not being determined by the individual. "... there is no such thing as the structure of meaning for him independently of this interpretation of them; for one is woven into the other ... the text of our interpretation is not that heterogeneous from what is interpreted; for what is interpreted is itself an interpretation. (Taylor, "Interpretation and the Science of Man" p. 109).

The self has been situated in this hermeneutical circle and there is no transcendence from this hermeneutical space. It essentially negates the possibility of an Archimedean stand-

point. This means that the community is the theoretical precondition for the derivation of meaning. It provides the content of interpretation. There is a possibility of more than one interpretation, in a given community, every interpretation is authentic because it is the manifestation of the linguistic community in which the self has been situated, "... the relationship between a person's inner life and the vocabulary available to him for characterizing it is an intimate one (Mulhall and Swift p. 109).

Despite the fact that every interpretation is just an interpretation, it is bounded by the experience, which the self has had as a precipitant of the linguistic community which legitimately constitutes its self-identity. This means that there is no final meaning. Meaning is necessarily derived from interpretation. The content of these interpretations are provided by the language and history of a community.

It is important to note that interpretation by definition does not provide fixed meanings. In order to reach meaning we do not have any instrument other than interpretation. But there is the possibility to objectively evaluate and order these interpretations on the basis of the meta-ethical narratives, which provide the substance of rationality and are by themselves supra-rational. *For instance, liberalism, communism, secularism, social welfarism, democracy, popular democracy etc. are all different interpretations which claim to objectify the meta-ethical narratives, which emerged during the particular course of European history.* In this way, Taylor has rejected the antecedently individuated self and has asserted that, it is not possible to derive abstract principles which are universally applicable. Since he presumed community as the ontological precondition for the constitution of self, this means that inter-subjective discourse is necessary for selfhood. Taylor rejects the possibility of the existence of an isolated self rather it is a "... self only in relation to certain interlocutors" (Taylor p. 360). Self-interpretation is possible only in the linguistic matrix, which is prior to the self. The individual is free to interpret but the medium is not derived from the self. This means that the derivation of meaning is a communal phenomena. In a more precise sense, goods, ends or virtues are communally derived by the self in relation to different interlocutors.

The self always has a virtue, which legitimizes its meaningful existence in the hermeneutical circle. It provides space for the culmination of inter-subjective consensus, in Taylor's words, the self always, finds itself in a "web of interlocutors" (Ibid p. 36).

On the basis of this conceptual analysis we can conclude:

1. The right based liberal conception of the self is not universal but historically determined and culturally specific.
2. There is no absolute, rational and epistemologically superior basis for the acceptance of liberal prioritization of right over good.
3. The self cannot detach itself from its end, its conception of good and virtues.
4. The right-based approach is not universally and cross culturally valid.

Human right discourse performs three dimensional functions: a) Development of civil society b) Establishment of the sovereignty of capital and c) Weakening the nation state.

The social form of "right based liberalism" is not compatible with any form of religious society. It assumes a 'civil society' in which the individuals are held together by the impersonal bonds of interest rather than the ties of faith. Civil society repudiates religious society and provides a social sphere which helps individuals to pursue their own conception of the good.

Civil society is basically a capitalist institution of instrumental nature. Its function is to sustain liberal public order, which is disintegrating, because of the politically and socially dangerous growth of inequalities between regions and individuals. Civil society and free market economy reinforce each other. Civil society demolishes any institution (social, political, religious, cultural) which hinders the process of capital accumulation. The market is the realm of capital. The accumulation of capital is not possible without the concentration of capital. The emergence of inequalities due to the concentration of capital is the natural corollary of market growth. Secondly people are naturally un-equal in their capacity to accumulate capital therefore, un-equal material status is necessary in market society. Thirdly in the market individuals lose their identity as man, or woman, black or white, Muslim or Kafir etc. In the market the identities individuals have are those of labourer, manager, consumer. *Thus each and every relation and identity is marketized and the issue of gender becomes irrelevant and fictitious. In reality the gender issue and human rights struggle in general are merely means to establish the sovereignty of capital.* The economic form of right-based society is capitalism.

- (a) Civil society provides the legitimate ground for the universalisation of capital accumulation for its own sake.
- (b) The concrete form of freedom is capital.
- (c) Maximization of capital is maximisation of freedom.
- (d) The discourse of human rights justifies maximization of capital accumulation for its own sake.

In a nutshell, "*human rights are the obverse of the duty to accumulate capital*". And the justification of this "duty" is that the individual is compelled to accept the sovereignty of capital because he does not have any instrument other than capital through which he can realize his freedom. Theoretically the individual is free to have any conception of the good, to desire anything he wants but the contradiction is that in actuality the only desire, he can have is the desire to accumulate capital because capital is the only concrete form of freedom.

III. Feminism or Islam

Human Development Report 2000 provides a structural solution to the problem of gender "discrimination". Gender discrimination is not seen as a cultural specific phenomena rather it is seen as a universal problem. However the perspective of the Report is anything, but universalist. It simply assumes that the western social ideological perspective and prejudices are universal and should provide a basis for evaluating all other prospectors.

The structural solution, provided in this Report is not only culturally biased but also full of inherent contradictions. For instance the Report legitimizes capitalism. In its conceptual

framework the market itself becomes a value-giving agency. The Market does not respect gender differences. The Market treats male and female as equal contractors. In the Market the question of moral, social and ontological differences are meaningless. Gender difference is trivialised in the Market. The homogenisation of labour obscures this difference and obscures the particularity of womanhood. This tantamounts to destruction of the spiritual foundations of society for commodification of female labour makes love impossible: That is why feminism is in its essence a movement for defeminisation.

The mood of the Report is ostensibly ethical but its ethical perspective is systematically backed by a particular epistemology and ontology. The problem is that the Report is presented as based on an universalist ethical perspective – where as in fact it represents merely the ethical practices and prejudices of the west. Abandoning the historical genealogical analysis required to situate gender discourse, the Report relies entirely on vulgar empiricism.

The major weakness of such empirical/statistical analysis is that, it is presented as value neutral i.e. scientific, rigorous and presuppositionless. In actuality the Report presumes a particular conception of human nature, purpose of life, and cosmological order. For instance the inherent presumptions of the Report are;

- i) The human being is homo-economicus.
- ii) The purpose of life is to maximize the discounted consumption stream over a given life time.
- iii) The world is eternal and ever lasting.

This gender issue opens up a new paradigm of discourse:

- i) It redefines women's role in accordance with the demands of the Market.
- ii) It provides a rationale for the accumulation of capital for its own sake – and woman is an equal of man essentially as an instrument of never ending capital accumulation.
- iii) It helps to constitute a body of rights/duties:
 - a) To transform the legal system (compatible with the imperialist sanctioned legal system) which establishes the hegemony of global capital and market rationality.
 - b) To widen the labour market and enhance the mobility of cheap (female) labour.
 - c) To transform the social system according to the demands of market globalization.

iv) Human rights discourse in general and gender discourse in particular is an effective means to disintegrate collectivities (religious, communal, family). Capitalism systematically disintegrates any form of collectivity, which provides a public order for this system. It is because of this, that capitalism is self constitutionally crises ridden. It disintegrates any form of collectivity, which sustains or resists the process of capital accumulation. Religious, traditional, tribal communities naturally resist the process of capital accumulation, because they recognise and emphasise the spiritual basis of individual and collective life. (i.e. love, fear of God, blood, kinship etc). Human rights discourse performs three functions simultaneously.

a) It helps to disintegrate any form of collectivity, which resists the process of capital accumulation.

b) It provides ethical justification for social-atomization and a social-individualism.

c) It helps to constitute a new form of pseudo collectivity (civil society) in which individuals are held together by impersonal bonds of interest. This pseudo collectivity recognises individualist freedom as the only legitimate "collective good".

The role of women in the Islamic world is decisive in sustaining Islamic public order. Islamic public order is a natural rival to any conception of the good which ignores the question of life after death, and assumes the eternity of the world. Western cultural domination, expanding market globalization and rising consumerism are major causes of the identity crises of our generation. Today our family structure is successfully resisting the proliferation of western values. Our family structure promotes, sustains and reproduces our religious, historical and cultural values. Thus the role of women is decisive in the socio-cultural war against capitalism and imperialism. The Muslim woman alone can stop this culturally specific and imperialistically imposed dehumanization and de-feminization sponsored by capitalism. Gender discourse's ultimate purpose is to destroy the Islamic faith of Muslim women, disintegrate the family and make every woman a slave of universal, permanent capital.

Notes

¹ Practical needs are human needs according to their socially determined context.

² Strategic needs are the needs generated by the commitment to confrontation with existing social relationships between male and female.

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